

Case Report

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**Report Title: Treatment of chronic mud fever with
acupuncture in a tinker**

Author Information:

Dr. vet. Med. Lena Meile

Oberwilerstrasse 54

6062 Wilen

079 829 36 92

lana-meile2@gmail.com

Abstract:

Acupuncture was used to improve clinical findings in a 13 years old tinker horse with chronic mud fever on all four legs. Treatment was started with western medicine 1.5 months before the first acupuncture treatment. With acupuncture the pruritus was improving, so that the wounds on all four legs could heal progressively. The treatment was used every 10 days for one month and will be continued in future if needed.

History:

Nash is a 13 years old tinker gelding. His constitution is something between earth and water. He has mud fever for years already. The previous owner didn't treat it ever and he had bad exercise too. So, the problem is existing already for years. He has very bad pruritus which caused many wounds on his legs, which were bleeding repeatedly. Two months ago, finally he changed owner. They tested him for Equine Cushing (ACTH was measured) but the test was negative. He was treated against ecto- and endoparasites and the new owner shaved all four legs and washes them with a disinfecting solution every day, removes all crusts and dries the legs. After it she uses a mud fever ointment on the lesions. The first few days of the western he got also Prednisolone to take away the inflammation and pruritus. All four legs from the coronary band to the fetlock joint are swollen, thickened and inflamed with crusts all over. After 6 weeks of daily treatment the inflammation is much better but the skin is still severely thickened. All four legs are still massive swollen. He still has some crusts which don't want to heal because he scratches them up again and again because they still itch.

Clinical signs and diagnosis conventional medicine (western)

In a general examination, he showed a normal heart and respiratory rate. He has no fever and normal Lymph nodes.

All four lower legs are massive swollen, and the skin is severely thickened. He still has some crusts which don't want to heal because he scratches them up again and again because they still itch. He scratches them up until they are bleeding. Affected are the lower legs from the coronary band to the fetlock joint, and some parts up until the carpal and tarsal joints. The legs are not so much inflamed any more as in the beginning of the treatment, but they are still severely enlarged.

Nash has a body condition score of 6-7 of 9. His skin and coat are greasy. He has poor musculature and a sway back. He has scanty urine and from the emotional point of view he seems a bit sad and depressed. He suffers because of the pruritus.

The diagnosis in western medicine is a chronic mud fever of all four legs.

Clinical signs and diagnosis TCM (eastern)

On the left side of the neck he has a depression with a diameter of about 10 centimeters. It is in the region of the Small intestine meridian. Nash showed reaction when palpating Large intestine 16 and 17 and stomach 10. His mucosa is dry and light pink. His urine is scanty but doesn't smell. The excrements and the appetite are normal.

The coat and skin are greasy to touch and on the lower legs he shows black greasy material on his skin.

His back in general is sensitive. Most sensitive Back-Shu points are Bladder 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 23 and 24. Sensitive Mu points were Conception vessel 12 and 14.

The pulse is slippery and is stronger on right then on the left side. Spleen is deficient, and an excess can be felt in lung, heart an pericard. This is what the Back-Shu points are reflecting too.

His tongue is pale and has slight phlegm on it. No teeth marks are visible.

A diagnosis of spleen deficiency was made by the greasy coat and skin. Based on that his immunity system is too weak to fight against exogen pathogenic factors, which invade in the lower legs. This forces the stasis of fluid in the lower legs and building of heat and damp. Stomach excess might be a consequence due to the stress he has caused by the itching.^{1,3}



Conventional (western) treatment:

Six weeks ago, the owner shaved all four legs and started with the daily washing of the legs with disinfecting solution. All crusts are removed every day and then the legs are dried. After that the owner puts an ointment on the wounds. Nash was treated with Prednisolone for 1 Month in the beginning of the treatment. He got 250mg per day for 23 days, and 5 more days 125mg.

TCM (Eastern) treatment:

The treatment goal is to tonify the spleen and drain the heat, damp and fluid from the legs. Symptomatically the aim of the treatment is to calm the pruritus.

I used Large intestine 11 to clear damp and heat from the body. Kidney 7 was used to regulate the water passage because of his swollen legs. Stomach 36 should calm the stomach because he has reactive Back-Shu and Mu points and as it is a generator of Qi in the body it should help also to get more energy. Spleen 3 treats the spleen deficiency and straighten the spleen organ. Governing Vessel 20 is a wind door, so we can let out the internal wind (pruritus) through it.^{1,2,4}

The acupuncture technique used in this case was dry needling in all sessions. Needles used are 0,25 x 25mm. They were placed at a depth of about 5mm, in even needle technique for all points. The needles were left for about 15 minutes.⁵

Used acupuncture points: 13.07.2018:

Point	Anatomical location	Indication
Large intestine 11, Qu Chi	In the transverse cubital crease, in the depression just cranial to the lateral epicondyle of the humerus, between the extensor carpi radialis and common digital extensor mm. This point is easily palpated when the elbow is flexed ⁴	Clears heat and damp anywhere in the body, cools blood, regulates humidity, immunestimulation ⁴
Kidney 7, Fuliu	In the depression 2 cun proximal to the most medial prominence of the medial malleolus of the tibia, just cranial to the calcaneal tendon ⁴	Straighten kidneys and regulates water passage, resolves damp, especially lower burner, good for edema in the lower hindlimbs ⁴
Stomach 36, Zu San Li	In the depression just lateral to the tibial crest, in the depression just lateral to the tibial crest, in the muscular groove between the tibialis cranialis and long digital extensor mm, 2 cun distal to the proximal edge of the tibial crest ⁴	Calming the stomach, MP for the cranial abdomen and digestive system, increases energy, expels wind and damp ⁴
Spleen 3, Taibai	In the depression, just proximal to the medial sesamoid bone between the suspensory ligament and deep flexor tendon, at the level of the distal end of the 2nd metatarsal bone ⁶	Straightens the spleen, clears humidity ⁶
Governing vessel 20, Baihui	On the dorsal midline, in the depression at the highest point of the poll, just rostral to the nuchal crest ⁴	Eliminates wind, straighten immunity system, benefits spleen function ⁴

Results of the first treatment:

The owner tells me that the horse was treated energetically two days after the acupuncture treatment. The horse didn't scratch anymore after these two treatments and the wounds started to heal more and more. The weather is very hot and humid and there are many flies around, which is not supporting the healing process but still we see a little progress.

Clinical impression of the patient:

Going over the Back-Shu points again shows less reactivity on lung, heart and pericard, but more reaction on liver (also the mu point is reactive). Spleen is still deficient. The caudal Back-Shu points are less reactive than last time too. Looking at his feet they are still swollen and have severely thickened skin, but he stands more still and doesn't seem to have such a bad pruritus as last time. He seems calmer.

Used points for the second treatment: 23.07.2018

Point	Anatomical location	Indication
Governing vessel 20, Baihui	On the dorsal midline, in the depression at the highest point of the poll, just rostral to the nuchal crest ⁴	Eliminates wind, straighten immunity system, benefits spleen function ⁴
Small intestine 3, Houxi	On the lateral side of the forelimb, in the depression just distal to the end of the 4 th metacarpal bone and proximal to the fetlock, on the palmarolateral border of the 3 rd metacarpal bone ⁴	Clears heat, benefits the sinews, expels Wind ^{2,4}
Spleen 6, San Yin Jiao	In the depression 3 cun proximal to the most medial prominence of the medial malleolus of the tibia, just caudal to the caudal border of the tibia, and dorsal to the combined heads of the deep digital flexor muscles ⁴	Benefits Liver, Spleen and Kidney function, tonifies Qi and Xue, dominates water metabolism, calms the mind, immune stimulation, resolves damp ^{2,4}
Spleen 9, Yin Ling Quan	In the depression just ventral to the medial condyle of the tibia, caudal to the caudal border of the tibia, over the popliteus muscle and cranial to the saphenous vein ⁴	Benefits spleen function, dispels and transforms dampness and eliminates heat, regulates the water passages ⁴
Large intestine 11, Qu Chi	In the transverse cubital crease, in the depression just cranial to the lateral epicondyle of the humerus, between the extensor carpi radialis and common digital extensor mm. This point is easily palpated when the elbow is flexed ⁴	Clears heat and damp anywhere in the body, cools blood, regulates humidity, immunestimulation ⁴



Nash during second session of acupuncture

Results of the treatment: He had less pruritus after the treatment. But in the past two days the owner is in hospital, so Nash wasn't treated with the western treatment. And it is very hot and humid weather so there are many flies on the wounds which disturbs him.

Clinical impression of the patient: His whole back is still sensitive but not as much as the first time. Lung, pericard and heart Back-Shu react bit more than last time. But these are also the most affected meridians on the legs. He still reacts in Liver Back-Shu and Mu point and is still deficient in spleen. From the mental state, he seems stressed because of the flies which disturb him a lot as the weather is very hot and humid the last few days. He prefers to stay into the stable these days because of the insects.

Used points for the third treatment: 03.08.2018

Point	Anatomical location	Indication
Governing Vessel 20, Baihui	On the dorsal midline, in the depression at the highest point of the poll, just rostral to the nuchal crest ⁴	Eliminates wind, straighten immunity system, benefits spleen function ⁴
Pericard 6, Nei Guan	In the depression, just cranial to the cranial border of the chestnut, midway between the proximal and distal ends of the chestnut ⁴	Calms heart and shen, regulates Qi, suppresses pain, harmonizes the stomach ⁴
Stomach 36, Zu San Li	In the depression just lateral to the tibial crest, in the depression just lateral to the tibial crest, in the muscular groove between the tibialis cranialis and long digital extensor mm, 2 cun distal to the proximal edge of the tibial crest ⁴	Calming the stomach, MP for the cranial abdomen and digestive system, increases energy, expels wind and damp ⁴

Spleen 6, San Yin Jiao	In the depression 3 cun proximal to the most medial prominence of the medial malleolus of the tibia, just caudal to the caudal border of the tibia, and dorsal to the combined heads of the deep digital flexor muscles ⁴	Benefits Liver, Spleen and Kidney function, tonifies Qi and Xue, dominates water metabolism, calms the mind, immune stimulation, resolves damp ^{2,4}
Large Intestine 11, Qi Chi	In the transverse cubital crease, in the depression just cranial to the lateral epicondyle of the humerus, between the extensor carpi radialis and common digital extensor mm. This point is easily palpated when the elbow is flexed ⁴	Clears heat and damp anywhere in the body, cools blood, regulates humidity, immunestimulation ⁴
Bladder 21, Weishu	3 cun lateral to the dorsal midline, in the depression caudal to the 18 th rib, between TH18 and L1, in the muscular groove between the longissimus thoracis and iliocostalis thoracis mm. ⁴	Benefits the spleen function, dispels and transforms dampness, nourishes blood ⁴
Liver 3, Tai Chong	On the medial aspect of the hind limb, in the depression just plantar to the 2 nd metatarsal bone and distal to its base. This would be at the level between the proximal and middle thirds of the 3 rd metatarsal bone ⁴	Clears fire, cools blood, calms the mind, sedates liver in excess, promotes flow of Qi, benefits liver function ⁴

Furthermore, I advised the owner to put him in the stable during day and let him out on the field during night because he is so much disturbed by the flies. They bring dirt in the wounds and cause more pruritus. So, it aggravates his problems.

Discussion:

Nash has a long-lasting history of mud fever. He wasn't treated for years so that he has severely thickened and swollen legs with crusts and a distracting pruritus. Since the owner changed they started with western treatment: they treated him against parasites, shaved his legs, wash it every day, remove the crusts and in the first few weeks he also got cortisone to calm the inflammation and the pruritus a bit. To support the western treatment and take away the pruritus, so that the wounds can heal finally, I supported Nash with acupuncture treatment about every 10 days. With his deficient spleen Back-Shu point, his greasy coat, legs and tongue, the scanty urine he shows a spleen deficiency with production of damp-heat. So, the main goal of the TCM treatment is to straighten the spleen, remove the damp-heat and let out the wind. To straighten the spleen and remove the damp points as spleen points as Spleen 6, 9 and Bladder 21. To remove the heat Large intestine 11 and Small intestine 3 were used. A wind door was opened every time with the point Governing Vessel 20. Stomach 36 was used to produce more Qi in general and calm the stomach.^{1,2,4}

The effect of the acupuncture treatment was visible but as expected I couldn't solve the problem in short time, as it is a chronic problem. But the pruritus was better, and Nash seemed to be more comfortable. We continue the treatment so that all the wounds can heal completely and then we will try to stop with the treatment.

Acupuncture is a very good option to support the western treatment of mud fever. But important is to combine the local therapy with shaving the hair and removing the crusts every day. Acupuncture is good to support the treatment in taking away the pain and the itching, to let the wounds heal better. As it is a chronic problem it is not possible to heal it in short time. It needs several treatments and long time. As the problem is existing already for several years and it has never been treated the skin is fibrotic which will not change anymore. Most important is to remove the pruritus and improve life quality for the horse. The hyperkeratosis and fibrosis in the lower legs needs months to resolve.

References:

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